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## SOME DEVICES FOR SUCCESSFUL WORK AT THE BLACKBOARD

It would seem sometimes that the blackboard was as old-fashioned as the old-time slate, so little use is made of it in many class-rooms. Can we imagine a class-room without the surrounding black walls? To be sure, it might be a more beautiful room, tinted walls hung with choice pictures—a cleaner room, no chalk dust on the desks and seats, but imagine the helplessness of the alert teacher who stands before the class with the ever-ready piece of chalk in hand, endeavoring to convey to the child's mind through the eye what the ear has failed to catch. What with the use of pictures, objects and the “movies” in modern education, must we not constantly have recourse to the eye to supplement the ability of the poorly trained ear?

The many devices the teacher has and the positive aid derived from her own use of the board for assignment and explanation for and during the recitation period are well known. What kind of board work can be done by pupils as individuals and as a class unit, and what are the positive results? Let us consider first the individual pupil in various forms of oral recitation.

1. Translation from German into English. Going on the assumption that only accurate translation into good English is tolerated, the pupil fails in accuracy because he has missed a construction; he fails to express the thought in good English because he has translated only words. Make him write the troublesome sentence on the board in German and then in English; the eye may quickly detect the error in construction or the faulty English. No time is wasted if the class meanwhile continues in recitation, coming back to the problem in question when the pupil has solved it.

2. This same method can be used to advantage when rapid questions and answers are part of the class work, where speed and accuracy count. The question has not been clearly understood or the answer is incorrect in construction. Another pupil volunteers to write the question on the board, and the first pupil is asked to write his answer. Again the recitation is not interrupted on this account.

3. In re-narration of a paragraph or chapter of a story that the class is studying, it is always advisable not to interrupt the pupils

reciting. The teacher makes a note of the errors on a slip of paper or writes them on the board quickly and quietly, so that the pupil is not confused by it while he is reciting. Watching the teacher, the entire class soon becomes equally critical and follows her example. Mention the errors and discuss quickly, then send the pupil, who must of course listen very closely, to the board to write the correct forms. Mistakes that can be corrected in this way are genders, case endings, verb forms and sentence order, unless the sentence be too long and complicated. If mistakes are still to be found, train other pupils to notice them by allowing them to pass to the board to check them. This creates such a lively interest sometimes that three or four jump up at once to check the same error, the one getting to the board first having the pleasure (?) of making the check mark. And this, too, is done while the recitation proceeds with another pupil in his oral work. Do not be afraid that too much attention will be paid to the board. Make pupils use eye and ear at the same time; they can and will give attention to both if you insist upon their doing more than one thing at a time.

4. On some days send a pupil to the board to write his re-narration of the paragraph or chapter. Limit this to ten or fifteen minutes. When he finishes, the class makes corrections, reading sentence after sentence round the class, the pupil merely checking the errors as the class mentions them; after that he proceeds with the actual corrections, writing the correct forms in a margin left at the board, or erasing and rewriting. I often let him use his text to make corrections. Sometimes I ask a bright pupil to help him out, to save time, so that the rest of the class can do something else meanwhile.

5. Again, in rapid oral drill of grammatical forms, especially in review, this same device may be used if done quickly and without interruption of the oral recitations. John starts with the list of dative prepositions, Mary continues and stumbles. Send her to the board to write them out and call on George to give another list. Each one round the class gives one tense in the synopsis of *sein*. It goes well until Mary fails to give the future. Send her to the board, go on with the oral work just the same. Pupils later help Mary by checking her board work if she still fails.

6. A very valuable exercise in dictation may be conducted by sending one pupil to write at a side or back board while the class write at their seats, all later correcting with the aid of the teacher, who checks the board work.

7. Sometimes I have written drill on forms in review. For instance, the declension of adjectives with nouns. All write the declension of *der grosse Baum* on paper except John, who writes his on the board. They do not watch him, so eager are they to get through before he does. Then Mary goes to the board for the next word and so on for about eight words, or until few or no mistakes are made. Pupils always like this exercise because it means a race.

Of course, not all these devices are to be used at any one time, but are taken in turn on days when occasion calls for them. They are of great value as a combination for training eye and ear to work together. Difficulty will arise if the work is not done quickly and with snap, a thing which is bound to happen if the teacher and class are not alert in detecting errors and if pupils are interrupted in recitation constantly. One important point is that the pupil must find his errors with his eye; if he learns to do this, he is not so apt to fail again on the particular point in question.

Board work for the entire class at the same time seems to many teachers a kindergarten method or very old-fashioned. Be they freshmen or seniors, sitting still for forty minutes or longer in the same, usually uncomfortable seats is, to say the least, tedious and wearisome. As soon as the pupil becomes conscious of physical conditions, the working power of his brain decreases. If no other benefit were derived from sending all to the blackboard than the resultant relaxation, that alone is worth while, even if it interrupts the continuity of the recitation. But I depend upon the use of the board absolutely for various results. I know when I intend to send a class to the board and why I do so. I plan the recitation almost to a minute and I am ready when the time comes. Teachers make a mistake, perhaps, when they do not realize the importance of assigning to each pupil a regular place at the blackboard that he calls his own, of having chalk there ready to use, and of permitting no delay in getting the class started and giving directions.

1. I sometimes give directions while the class is seated, either the same instructions to the entire class, which then passes together at one time, or special instructions to individual pupils, who pass singly as they receive them. Thus, when we are reviewing verb forms, six pupils are assigned one tense each of a strong verb, six others the same of a weak verb, two others a synopsis, and others principal parts; as soon as he receives his assignment, the pupil moves quickly to the board. Sometimes the first pupil has finished his work before the last direction has been given out; then he is given some more work, oral perhaps, or he gives his attention to the work of the other pupils so as to be ready to correct their work as soon as they are through, and they, in turn, do likewise.<sup>1</sup>

2. At another time I send all to the board and they number by twos or threes. Number ones write the synopsis or principal parts of a strong verb; number twos that of a weak verb, and so on. I do not wait till all have finished. If they finish pretty evenly they exchange places and correct each other's work, or each one erases as soon as he has finished and the work has been approved by me. Or, as soon as any one has finished, those of his number must stop and we compare results. This latter method promotes speed and accuracy, too.

3. For review work in forms rapidity counts; if we wait for the slow ones we waste time. The same kind of board work can be done in declensions as with verbs. When I want to find out whether forms need special review, I send all to the board to do the same thing at the same time. At first we go slowly and wait for slow pupils, then faster as we continue, urging the laggards to greater speed. A teacher must have as many eyes in her head as she has pupils in her class; at first she will have difficulty in noting the individual errors, but practice will probably enable her to detect them soon after they go down.

4. When I present a new principle in the grammar lesson, e.g., the declension of adjectives with *der*-words and *ein*-words, I

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<sup>1</sup>It is very easy for the teacher in the meantime to mark the pupils' work in her book or on her card if she cares to keep a daily record. There is an advantage in keeping such a record because results are so definite; a much more important matter is that a teacher soon finds the weak spots in the class and can remember what kind of work each pupil does and what help he needs without actually making a note of it.

proceed from the known to the new forms. Pupils write the declension of *der* singular and plural, one form under the other. Then, leaving a space, they write the declension of a masculine noun at the right of the article. Next they insert in the space the adjective without any endings; now we are ready to add the endings for the weak declension of adjectives. After several examples I call for the rule, and they can usually make it up, and apply it at once to the other two genders and with other words in the *der*-list. Then we take up the declension with the *ein*-words in the same way, but usually not the same day. If pupils are trained to follow directions quickly, this work can be done in a very short time, and it has saved time for the pupil. He simply does not know how to study new forms out of his book, because he does not read directions and explanations carefully enough, nor will he listen to them if you read them for him or tell them to him. Through the plan outlined he has actually done the work that he finds in his text-book for the next day's assignment. This works very well also for verbs and modal auxiliaries, where rules for endings and vowel changes must be learned. Again, you must have twenty-four eyes in your head, because you must help the slow one and hold back the rapid, but careless worker. This kind of a lesson must be most carefully planned step by step, if no time is to be wasted.

You will ask whether the pupils copy from one another. They do, much more at first, however, than later on, when they understand that they are watched because you are there to help them. And if poor, slow Mary copies from her brighter neighbor at times, perhaps with your permission and encouragement, does it do her much harm? Does she not get more in less time than if she labored at her seat by herself and failed utterly because of discouragement and lack of confidence?

5. Occasionally I dictate German sentences to the entire class at the board, standing in the center of the room where I can see them all and where they ought to be able to hear me; it is excellent drill for eye and ear, especially if the entire sentence is read before the pupils are allowed to write it, and if it is never repeated until all the sentences are finished.

6. I believe every grammar has some English sentences which are to be translated into German. This has always been and still

is the most difficult kind of a lesson to teach. There is so much occasion for poor, careless work without any thought on the part of the pupil and he seems to land nowhere. Unless pupils have had drill in sentence-writing in Latin, they make so many careless mistakes that results are often worse than nothing. I used to write the English sentences on slips of paper and pass them round, but I have abandoned that method except for advanced students. The pupils are not interested in any sentence but their own unless the English is put on the board, and that is a waste of time in class. Instead, why not put the English sentences on the board before class and assign them to the pupils by number? This is successful if you do not use the board for other classes in the meantime.

For a beginning class, we develop each sentence orally, perhaps with the aid of the board, and then the following day they are assigned for board or book work. If they are difficult, they are put on the board first, and at some later date put into the notebooks to be handed in. I do not believe in putting them on the board from memory because it takes too much time and they are generally too full of mistakes. I allow the paper or the text to be taken to the board.

In the composition work in more advanced classes we take the reading lesson that accompanies the sentences, or the rules and principles if there is no reading matter, all at the same time. The sentences are prepared outside of class and quickly copied on the board. We state the application of the principle or rule as each sentence is read, the pupils making corrections in their own papers. The book we are using in our third-year work has eighteen sentences in each lesson. This enables us to write each one on the board and to discuss it during the recitation. We use our text book and papers freely and talk in English about the grammar points involved in the sentences. I review these in oral or written tests, as happens to be convenient or feasible. So far I have found no quicker and better method.

7. Lastly (and this is most old-fashioned and I suppose not in agreement with any reform method), I teach syntax by dictating English sentences, each one to be written by the entire class at the board in German. Sometimes we write ten sentences, sometimes only five. I want to drill on the order of the verb in a sentence, transposed order. I start with a simple sentence,

gradually building it up into a complex sentence. The process of taking out the personal verb and placing it at the end of the clause is a mechanical trick; the eye may catch it where the ear has not. We can often work out ten sentences in as many minutes. The same can be done with the inverted order, also with prepositional constructions, compound tenses of modals, and so on. This exercise is a sort of game if you will let pupils keep a score of the number they get right. Any mechanical drill is a relaxation for mind and muscle and proves valuable if you are ready for it when the pupils need it.

As I have indicated before, these few devices have their particular place in teaching the study that sometimes seems the hardest of all branches in the high-school curriculum. They have come to me during a long experience. I have returned to many of my old methods of board work after repeatedly trying to be converted to the new, almost exclusively oral recitation, and finding it lacking in precision and permanency.

A popular slogan of today is, "Teach the child, not the subject." I can find no better way of helping and teaching a child than to know how he goes at his work, learning and improving his habits of study. How can I do this better than by watching him at the board along with twenty others? If he goes often, he soon forgets that he is being watched and works because he wants to get results and keep up with his class. How often I have watched a slow pupil at the board, the first few times accomplishing almost nothing because of failure to get my directions, and when getting them, so far behind the class that the point was lost, or in bewilderment just copying from his neighbor. What satisfaction it has been to watch him gradually overcome these difficulties to the point where he could, sometimes at least, finish with the class! What a look of joy on his face when he could work out his problem alone and wheel about to face you, knowing what he had done was there to see and was worth seeing! If there is only one such result in each class in one year, has it not been worth the careful planning and constant alertness required of the teacher?

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